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**Follow-up to the Astana Ministerial Conference and preparation
of the “Environment for Europe” mid-term review**

Preparation of the “Environment for Europe” mid-term review*

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Reform Plan¹ of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) process stipulates that a mid-term review should be convened by the Committee on Environmental Policy to assess progress in the implementation of the outcomes of the EfE Conferences and provide renewed impetus to the process. The review should be based on existing information. The findings of the review should be taken into account in the preparatory process of the next conference.

The Seventh EfE Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) invited the Committee to convene in 2013 a mid-term review to assess progress of the implementation of the outcomes of the Conference.

The present document presents an overview of the Astana Ministerial Conference and introduces proposals for the preparations for the mid-term review in 2013, including its scope, format and modalities.

The Committee will be invited to discuss these proposals and take decisions, as necessary.

* The present document is submitted late due to human resources constraints.

¹ The Reform Plan of the “Environment for Europe” process was developed by the Committee on Environmental Policy during 2008 and adopted on 29 January 2009 (ECE/CEP/S/152 and Corr.1, annex I); the Plan was subsequently endorsed by United Nations Economic Commission for Europe at its sixty-third session (Geneva, 30 March–1 April 2009).

I. Overview of the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference

1. The Astana “Environment for Europe” (EfE) Ministerial Conference was the first EfE Conference organized in accordance with the Reform Plan of the EfE process. The preparatory process for the Astana Ministerial Conference commenced in 2009 and included four meetings of the Committee on Environmental Policy (October 2009, November 2010, May and September 2011), two meetings of its Extended Bureau (May 2009 and March 2010), and one joint meeting of the Bureaux of the Committee and of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) (January 2010).
2. The Astana Ministerial Conference gathered more than 1,500 participants from Governments, the international community, civil society, business and the media throughout the ECE region, to discuss two main themes: sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems; and greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development.
3. Participants discussed at length the findings of the two main reports produced for the Conference: *Europe’s Environment — An Assessment of Assessments* (EE-AoA), coordinated and produced by the European Environment Agency (EEA) in cooperation with the countries and EfE partners, and the *Second Assessment of Transboundary Rivers, Lakes and Groundwaters* developed under the auspices of the Water Convention.
4. The Conference culminated in the adoption of the Astana Ministerial Declaration — a concise and comprehensive document — in which ministers confirmed their commitment to improving environmental protection and promoting sustainable development in the ECE region through the EfE process, as well as decided on a number of follow up and further actions under the two themes of the Conference.
5. The event was organized in an interactive format, including nine high-level multi-stakeholder round tables. To support multi-stakeholder discussions during the Conference and to facilitate decision-making, substantive documents on each of the two main themes were prepared by ECE jointly with EfE partners. Also, a number of valuable information documents as well as a set of nine factsheets for journalists were prepared by ECE and the EfE partners. For the first time, the EfE Ministerial Conference was a paperless event.
6. The EfE partners organized 43 side events on issues related to the two main themes of the Conference on the margins of the event. The Conference gathered many business and industry representatives, who also participated in a Green Innovations, Technologies and Ecoservices Fair, organized on the margins of the Conference. Representatives of media attended the Conference, preceded by a capacity-building workshop for journalists.²

II. Scope of the mid-term review

7. The Reform Plan of the EfE process stipulates that particular efforts should be made by all relevant responsible actors to implement the outcomes of the EfE Ministerial Conferences. Member States should regularly consider how to promote objectives and priorities of the EfE process and strengthen implementation of the outcomes of the EfE

² Conference documents and materials are available on the ECE website (<http://www.unece.org/env/efe/astana/welcome.html>).

Conferences, including through national policies and relevant partnerships. Active participation by and input of all interested countries of ECE, and in particular of interested countries of subregions with specific needs in improving their environmental situation is crucial for the success of the activities under the Efe process.

8. The outcomes of the Astana Ministerial Conference are contained in the following three documents: the Ministerial Declaration (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1); the Chair's Summary of the Conference (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.2); and a factual report of the Conference (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2).

9. The main follow-up activities to the Astana Conference include: (a) implementing the Astana Water Action; (b) promoting a green economy in the region and supporting the Green Bridge Partnership Programme; (c) conducting a third cycle of environmental performance reviews; (d) establishment of a regular process of environmental assessment; and (e) other activities, such as the work of Environmental Action Programme (EAP) Task Force and of the Regional Environmental Centres (RECs).

10. The Committee, at its eighteenth session, may wish to consider taking specific actions to prepare background documents (mid-term review reports) for the mid-term review in 2013, as follows:

A. Astana Water Action

11. Ministers endorsed the Astana Water Action (see document ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/5) and welcomed the initiatives launched by interested countries and organizations during the Conference aimed at improving water management and strengthening transboundary cooperation. They invited countries and other actors to implement the Astana Water Action and to report progress to the Committee on Environmental Policy.

12. Registered actions to which countries and organizations committed before the Astana Conference as well as new actions submitted after the Conference are available on the ECE website (<http://www.unece.org/env/efe/Astana/documents.html>).

13. The Committee might invite delegations to report on the progress achieved in the implementation of the Astana Water Action on the basis of a template prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureaux of the Committee and the Water Convention. On the basis of such reports, to be submitted by 19 November 2012, the secretariat would prepare a review document.

B. Greening the economy

14. Ministers in Astana agreed to take the lead in the transition to a green economy and to make a substantive contribution to the discussions on green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty alleviation at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference). They invited ECE to contribute, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and relevant international organizations, to the development of the Rio+20 Green Economy outcomes.

15. Furthermore, the Ministers welcomed and supported, as appropriate, the "Green Bridge" Initiative and Partnership Programme, and encouraged its further development. Ministers invited interested Governments, international financial institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders to join this Programme to promote an environmentally sustainable, equitable and prosperous future in both the pan-European and the Asia and the Pacific regions.

16. The Committee might consider inviting the secretariat to prepare jointly with UNEP and other relevant EfE partners an overview on developments in the ECE region towards a green economy, especially on the issues of low carbon mobility, increased resource efficiency, including energy and water use efficiency, renewable energy, green jobs and green innovation.

17. The Committee might also invite the delegation of Kazakhstan to prepare, in cooperation with its partners, a report on the development of the “Green Bridge” Partnership Programme.

C. Environmental performance reviews

18. Building up upon the success of the ECE Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme, Ministers in Astana invited ECE to conduct its third cycle of EPRs, which may include environmental governance and financing in a green economy context, countries’ cooperation with the international community and environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors.

19. The Committee might invite the secretariat to report on progress made in the preparations for the EPRs third cycle.

D. Environmental assessment and reporting

20. Ministers decided in Astana to establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) across the region in order to keep the pan-European environment under review. These should serve multiple policy processes, including multilateral environmental agreements, and include capacity-building of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe to monitor and assess their environment. The Ministers invited the EEA and its partners to develop an outline for how these actions could be performed and to present it to the Committee on Environmental Policy.

21. The Committee might invite the EEA together with its partners to prepare an overview on progress made in establishing a regular process of environmental assessment.

22. The Committee might also invite the secretariat of the Water Convention to report on steps taken and future plans related to the preparation of future assessments of transboundary waters and the envisaged cooperation with SEIS.

E. Other activities

23. The Ministers in Astana welcomed the work of the EAP Task Force and invited the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to continue its work, including on themes of the Conference, in cooperation with RECs and other partners.

24. Furthermore, the Ministers recognised the role of RECs in communicating and implementing initiatives, and called for strengthening RECs’ contributions in both promoting green economy and better environmental governance at the local, national, subregional and regional levels.

25. The Committee might invite the EAP Task Force to prepare a report on progress made in its activities, especially on water and greening the economy.

26. The Committee might also invite RECs to prepare jointly a report on progress they made in promoting green economy and better environmental governance.

III. Format and modalities of the mid-term review

27. The mid-term review could be convened in the framework of the next annual session of the Committee provisionally scheduled to be held in Geneva from 23 to 26 April 2013. Up to one-and-a-half days could be dedicated to the review. A tentative time schedule of the mid-term review segment is presented in annex I to this document.

28. Participation in the mid-term review would include representatives of Governments (Members of the Committee on Environmental Policy), intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as business and other relevant stakeholders.

29. The mid-term review could be organized in the form of plenary sessions as well as multi-stakeholder panel discussions, e.g. on the Astana Water Action and on greening the economy. The two panel discussions could include some five panellists per panel (representatives of Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as business and other relevant stakeholders). Each panel discussion could commence with keynote addresses by panellists (up to seven minutes per address) to kick-off the discussion, followed by a facilitated interactive discussion from the floor.

30. Brief documents (mid-term review reports) of some eight pages (up to 4,500 words) on issues referred to in section II (A–E) of the present document would be prepared by relevant EfE partners. Such documents would need to be submitted to the secretariat by 30 November 2012 with a view to be processed in the three ECE official languages (English, French and Russian) in due time for the mid-term review. EfE partners that could ensure an adequate translation of their respective document(s) into the three languages should submit these document(s) to the secretariat by 28 February 2013. To ensure a harmonised approach in preparing the mid-term review reports, the secretariat is proposing a template presented in annex II of the current document.

31. The Committee may wish to entrust the secretariat, in consultation with the Committee's Bureau and in cooperation with relevant EfE partners, to proceed with preparations for the mid-term review in line with the above proposals.

Annex I

Tentative schedule for the mid-term review

<i>Tuesday, 23 April 2013</i>		<i>Time</i>
1.	Opening of the meeting, election of officers, etc. <i>plenary session</i>	10–10.30 a.m.
2.	Mid-term review: <i>plenary sessions and panel discussions</i>	10.30 a.m.–6 p.m.
A.	Astana Water Action <i>panel discussion</i>	10.30 a.m.– noon
	<i>coffee break</i>	<i>noon–12.15 p.m.</i>
C.	EPRs third cycle <i>plenary session</i>	12.15–1 p.m.
	<i>lunch break</i>	<i>1–3 p.m.</i>
B.	Greening the economy <i>panel discussion</i>	3–4.30 p.m.
	<i>coffee break</i>	<i>4.30–4.45 p.m.</i>
D.	Environmental assessment and reporting <i>plenary session</i>	4.45–6 p.m.
<i>Wednesday, 24 April 2013</i>		<i>Time</i>
2.	Mid-term review (<i>cont'd</i>):	9.30–11 a.m.
E.	Other activities <i>plenary session</i>	9.30–11 a.m.
	<i>coffee break</i>	<i>11–11.15 a.m.</i>
3.	[...] continuing the annual session <i>plenary session</i>	11.15 a.m.–12.30 p.m. ^a
	<i>lunch break</i>	<i>12.30–2.30 p.m.</i>
4.	[...] continuing the annual session	2.30–5.30 p.m.

^a This time would be reserved for the discussion about the next Conference.

Annex II

Proposed template for preparing reports for the mid-term review

1. Title of the report
 2. Overview of main achievements and, as appropriate, key findings (*up to four pages*)
 3. Challenges and lessons learned (*up to two pages*)
 4. Further steps (*up to two pages*)
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